

STEVEN
KASHER
GALLERY

Essence of the American Thoroughbred captured in black and white

By: horsetalk.co.nz

May 27, 2016



More than 25 large-scale black and white photographs of some of the USA's greatest race horses are on show in the debut exhibition of British born photographer Neil Latham.

Steven Kasher Gallery is presenting "Neil Latham: American Thoroughbred" in conjunction with the publication of Latham's monograph American Thoroughbred (Twin Palms, 2016), and the Belmont Stakes, the third leg of racing's Triple Crown.

Pictures include those of Triple Crown winner American Pharoah, Zenyatta, AP Indy, Rachel Alexandra, and many others.

The pictures stem from a drive that Latham took into horse country north of New York City in 2013. He had taken time out to clear his head after his mother's passing.

"I remember the instant it happened. I saw the muscular shoulder of a horse standing by a fence, and I flashed on my mother's similar back shoulder as she worked in her rose garden," Latham said.

"I stopped breathing. I hit the brakes and stared."

STEVEN KASHER GALLERY

He reached for his camera and began to photograph. “The muscular definition and power of the animal was intriguing to me. I tapped into something in that split second, and it linked to my mother. I felt compelled to discover what the connection was.”

What he recorded that day on film launched him on a three-year journey to explore the enigma of the American Thoroughbred.

Latham convinced horse owners and trainers to let him photograph their multimillion-dollar racehorses. He crisscrossed the country loaded with equipment. He spent months sleeping in the groom dorms at Saratoga Race Course and camping in a tent at Kentucky Horse Park.

“I wanted to capture the animal’s form and essential qualities and so I had to live it,” he said.

He photographed thoroughbred legends such as A.P. Indy, Curlin, Tapit, Rachel Alexandra, and Ghostzapper, and shared a unique connection with retired racing legend Zenyatta.

Latham spent months photographing at racecourses and horse farms, roaming the stables, seeking to comprehend the special pride and dominant air that the thoroughbreds embody. Latham scheduled shoots at horse farms, experimenting with photographic equipment, light, exposure, large-scale sets, and endless technicalities to achieve his creative vision. He used only natural lighting, creating a further set of technical challenges, and chose to shoot on film with medium and large-format cameras.

“To portray true essence, the image has to be truthful; I used film because it can’t be manipulated like digital photography. Film also gives a softness and subtlety that enhanced the emotional connection.”

Latham built a portable studio with a black backdrop 20 feet tall and 36 feet wide held up with industrial stands, staked to the ground. The entire set had to be rotated 10 degrees every 15 minutes to maintain the perfect angle to the sun; in a full day 27 times. Each photograph was based on an initial sketch.

“As an artist, I’m intrigued by the juxtaposition of strength and power with beauty and fragility, the illustration of determination and character through taut muscles and coursing veins after a fast-paced run, the wild spirit of a charging herd. I’ve never felt as deeply about anything as I have about this work,” Latham said.

Latham, a fine art and commercial photographer, was born in 1969 in Warwickshire, England. From an early age, Latham was exposed to photography by his parents who always carried their 35mm cameras. After the passing of his mother, Latham’s work took a major shift toward the more personal and serious, starting with American Thoroughbred.